



This court's for you, night owls

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If life was like the movies or TV, upcoming evening sessions of the Genesee County district courts might have a catchy advertising phrase like, "New and improved, double the performance."

There's no catchy slogan, but the Central District Court judges want people who owe fines and fees to know that "night courts" are being scheduled - two at a time - with them in mind.

"The idea is that we'll be focusing on people who owe money to the court in fines, costs and oversight fees," said Fenton District Judge Mark McCabe.

Night courts, or courts convened during evening hours and even into the early morning, have been held previously, McCabe said, but only at one district court location at a time. Now, the night sessions will be held at two locations on the same date - a sort of night court double-feature.

Why? Coordinated efforts between court officials and local police allow them to concentrate on bringing in people who have outstanding warrants and unpaid fines, outside of the press of other daily court and law enforcement business.

One recent night court sweep generated several thousand dollars in fines and fees in several hours' time - and that was just at one district court. Holding two courts at the same time, therefore, might just get the county more bucks for the bang of the judges' night court gavels, court officials say.

But the judges and court officials say they would rather have people come in and settle their outstanding fines and cases than see them arrested and brought into court - night or day.

"Our hope is people who have these cases turn themselves in earlier rather than later," McCabe said. "We're always willing to work out a payment plan, to listen to people. But if they don't do it this way, then they may end up in jail."

McCabe said that while they aren't releasing a specific schedule as to the dates of the night courts, the first, coming within the next month or so, will be held at the Fenton and Grand Blanc courts, then the Flushing and Mt. Morris courts, and then the Davison and Burton courts.

"We want to impress on people that they aren't simply being invited to come in to take care of their fines," the judge said. "We're demanding it."

The outstanding amounts owed by offenders in Genesee County outside of Flint is probably "in seven figures," the judge said.

So as they might say on TV - night courts are coming soon, to a district courthouse near you.

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